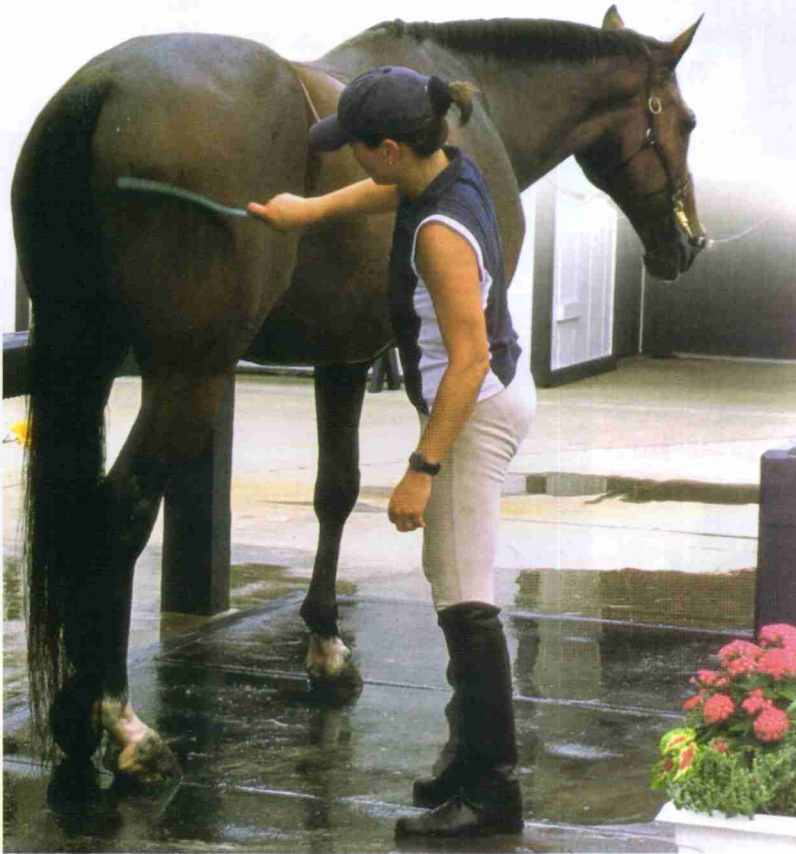


How to be a Trainer - Part 4

Horse Maintenance (Part 1)

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The rider, horse and the coach form the core of any team, but the work of the farrier, groom, vet and dental specialist (backup team) keeps the show on the road. With the possible exception of the horse, there can be no stars in the team. All the roles of the members are respected, but we have to remember the quote "No sound horse, No sport". In this part of how to be a trainer, I explain how to keep your sport horse fit, happy and healthy. Horse maintenance includes stabling, health, fitness and shoeing, and in this issue of Horse Times we focus on stabling.

Stabling

1.Handling: Some horse breeders err for far too long when bringing up young horses with little handling. Such

horses will grow up in a natural state with a lot of difficulties when broken and even after. Such difficulties can be avoided by saving a lot of time and effort in training. If the horse was initially handled properly from the time he was born, developing confidence in human beings would be easy. Difficulties in handling, shoeing, putting the tack on, and mounting, etc. come from old and bad horse management. The groom hence plays the biggest role in providing safe, secure environments and the daily routine that a horse needs. A groom is in the best position to spot small changes in behaviour or health that may require attention, and can also provide companionship for the horse, making him psychologically balanced for training.

2.The Box: Most horses stay 23 hours a day in their boxes. Pawing the straw backwards will make the horse stand at a lower level in front putting extra weight on his forelegs. Normally when a horse is standing, 3 fifth of the horse's weight is on his forelegs. Raising the floor, in the area where the horse is standing mostly, by a 15 degree angle (slope) will save the horse's forelegs, back, shoulders and neck muscles. The horse box should be wide and pleasant enough.

The feed manger should be large (75x30x30 cm) to prevent the horse from nosing out his feed. The height of 65 cm is enough to prevent the horse from pawing and will at the same time make use of his neck and back muscles. Drinking is very important for the horse. Automatic drinkers should be in a corner to avoid injury to the horse's legs when rolling inside the box. One might need to close the drinker for some time after a hard exercise when the horse is warm. The use of buckets several times a day for drinking is another alternative, but one should never leave the bucket in the box.

If the hay net is fixed high in the box, a problem to the horse's neck and back muscles could be caused whilst reaching the hay together with dust in his eyes. If it is in a low position, the horse can get tangled in it with his legs. The best way is to put hay on the ground to be eaten in the natural position.

Bedding is important for the horse and straw is the most convenient. If a horse

eats his bedding then wood shavings would also do the job. Unfortunately hocks and elbows are often capped and spoiled; muscles would then stiffen from lying on insufficient bedding. Some boxes have 3 horizontal grooves along the sides (1-1.3 meters high). In the event of the horse being cast, he can get a firm grip with his hooves to free himself from the wall.

Good ventilation in the stable is a must as much as it's essential to have plenty of fresh air, but it still mustn't be drafty. During winter time the stable should be warm (not over 18 degrees Celsius), but never humid. Windows should be high enough so that the horse's legs cannot get caught when he rolls. Bad ventilation and dust cause bronchitis, chronic coughs and broken wind. Always shake the straw when the horse is not in the box. Hay should also be shaken well outside the box before feeding.

3. Feeding: It's not within my intentions to give a feeding schedule as to what and how much a horse should be fed! However the quantity and type of food required depends entirely on the horse's digestion, the amount of work on each particular day, the horse's age, size, and temperament. Incorrect feeding can seriously affect the horse's health and training. His physical condition, muscles, wind, temper and sight are affected by feeding. To keep a horse's appetite, he must not be overworked and the food should not be monotonous. The food should be rationed into small portions given 4 times a day. Don't overload the sensitive stomach of the horse and give at least 2 hours of rest after each feed or colic may occur. The horse needs a total of 1 kg of food per 50 kg of body weight a day (both hay and dried food) as well as not more than half a kg of dry food (oats) per 50 kg of body weight a day divided into 4 meals. Hay provides about 12%

proteins. The horse also needs 30 to 60 litres of water a day close to him all the time or frequently offered. Don't forget to provide a salt lick in the stable and give electrolytes after a hard and sweaty exercise.

4. Boredom and stable vices: Horses are herd animals that live in groups. But when they are exercise horses, lonely in a relatively small box without enough attention and exercise, they

of minerals or the presence of worms. There is a risk of bacterial infection or re-infestation with worms. The use of a better balanced diet and a block of rock salts (in the manger, to be used, better than hanging on the wall) could improve this vice.

Wind sucking may cause indigestion and loss of condition. Boredom is also the main cause but other causes include internal parasites or giving too



can get bored and develop stable vices.

Eating the bedding is a bad habit due to boredom and to a lesser extent insufficient food or food without enough bulk. This is unhealthy for the digestion and kidneys of the horse and will make him weak. The use of wood shavings may solve the problem.

Pawing the door is another bad habit that might cause swollen knees and other horse injuries. An iron bar on top of the door will make the horse stand further away from the door.

Eating timber (splinters) is very dangerous. The use of a mixture of Vaseline and red-pepper on the timber will keep the horse away.

Eating droppings could be due to lack

much sugar or food from outside the box making the horse lick the soaked box door (or feeding manger) and use them as a support to suck air by holding their edges by its teeth. A crib-biting strap is used to cure this together with regular exercise. Care should be taken to keep a wind sucking horse from others so that he doesn't pass on this undesirable habit.

Box walking and weaving are provoked by loneliness, boredom and lack of exercise. This will cause continuous strain on his tendons and joints which may also cause loss of physical condition. The company of a dehorned goat or a gelded donkey in the box may work wonders! Another method is to install a metal grille in the wall between the horses in order to let them communicate. **HT**